ART AND ETHNOLOGY.

By EDWIN SWIFT BALCH.

(*Read April 23, 1908.*)

Man has been studied in many ways and from many directions: history, language, archeology, anatomy, natural history, geography and other sciences have been called upon in the elucidation of the problems of his history, descent, evolution and origin. The evidence which has been gathered from these many different sources about man and his history may be divided into two classes: that which can be obtained from his own personality or his own remains, a class I do not need to mention again in this paper; and that which can be obtained from what man has produced, and this class of evidence may be subdivided into three sub-classes, namely, written records, implements and art.

The most primarily available evidence in tracing the story of the human race is, of course, written records, and whenever we find written records which we can interpret we speak of history; but when, as in the case of savages, there are no written records, or when, as in the case of Old Mexico, we cannot read the records, the subject changes from history into ethnology and pre-history.

When there are no written records, another class of evidence, that obtained from implements, is largely resorted to by ethnologists. The term "implements," as used in this paper, should perhaps be defined as an abbreviated name for the products of the mechanical arts, without some of which at least no man can live. All modern implements have evolved from primitive beginnings, as, for instance, the twelve-inch shell, which is really the most modern form of the flint arrowhead. Much light has been shed already and more will be shed on the story of man by a comparison of the various implements used in different places and at different times.

The other great class of evidence is art, under which term must be understood the fine arts of sculpture, drawing and painting.

Some use has been made of this class of evidence; nevertheless, it is far below what it should be and usually it is only local in its deductions. There are plenty of treatises relating to the art of the white races, of the modern Europeans, of the Romans, of the Greeks; some on Egyptian art; others on Kaldean art and Assyrian art; some on Old Mexican art and Peruvian art, and so forth. But so little is the subject worked out even locally, that there is practically no special publication about African art or Brazilian art, and it is only within the twentieth century that we find the first serious attempt to trace back the wonderful art of China. As a subject of study, either from an artistic or an ethnological standpoint, the art of the world as a whole is so far almost untouched. Even in such an excellent recent art history as Mr. S. Reinach's "Art Throughout the Ages," one finds that by art he means European art alone and that Hindu art or Chinese art or Mexican art are left out in the cold. Whether art comes from only one center or whether there are several foci of dispersion; what relations, what resemblances, and what differences there are in the art of the world as a whole, is as yet an almost virgin field. If I am not mistaken, only one attempt has been made (by the writer himself) to study and classify art in every district of the globe.

Probably the main reason why art in totality is still so largely unstudied is that it is only recently that art specimens from everywhere have been collected, placed in museums, and made accessible. But, connected with this placing of art specimens in museums, there is a curious fact which shows that the art of the world, at present, appears to hang in a sort of borderland between art and science. The specimens are divided. Some are placed in art museums, others in ethnological museums. For instance, in Philadelphia, art specimens are divided between the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the University Archeological Museum; in Washington, between the Corcoran Gallery and the United States National Museum; in New York, between the Metropolitan Museum and the American Museum of Natural History; in Boston, between the Museum of Fine Arts and the Cambridge Peabody Museum. There is no place where anyone can go and get a comprehensive view of art from all over the world.

PROC. AMER. PHIL. SOC. XLVII. 188 C, PRINTED JULY 10, 1908.

The art of at least half the races of the world has thus found its way into ethnological museums. There it is not yet culled out as art, but the specimens are looked on rather as belonging to the class which can be most briefly called implements. This is not to be wondered at. Ethnologists, as a rule, have not had any special art training. Among artists it is a pretty thoroughly understood thing—and this can be stated only as a dictum and not discussed in this paper—that only a trained artist can criticize art seriously; in fact, the present most prevalent opinions about art are largely the consensus of opinion of the many artist art critics of modern times. Whilst possibly unconscious of this fact, ethnologists are usually aware of their inability to discuss the esthetic qualities of art specimens, and hence, while they frequently study the decorative art of savages, its patterns and its origins they are apt to leave the esthetic qualities of art alone.

Whilst scientists, therefore, generally do not give much thought to the esthetic points of the art specimens in ethnological museums, on the other hand, artists and art critics so far have paid no attention to such arts as African or Australian art. In the overwhelming majority of cases, they are doubtless unaware of the existence of such arts, and if they did know of them they would in many cases despise them, because these arts do not have the qualities of Greek art or Japanese art or French art. Art critics also usually know nothing of ethnology, and certainly care less. It takes a good deal of time and thought and study to learn something of ethnology, and any scientist knows that only a specialist can really give an opinion about it. The result of these somewhat complex conditions is that both ethnologists and art critics have neglected the esthetic arts of perhaps half the races of the world.

It seems as if it should be recognized that the present state of things leaves a gap in knowledge. It is time that this gap should be filled in and that the art of the entire world should be worked out as a whole into its proper divisions and its relations. Practically this will amount to forming a new branch of science, a science which might well be termed comparative art, and it seems just as necessary that there should be a science of comparative art as a science of comparative philology or a science of comparative anat-

omy. It will be a science in which art critics and ethnologists will have to work hand in hand; it will either have to be worked out by trained artists and also by ethnologists, or better still, comparative art must be handled by men who are something of specialists in both fields.

Comparative art should not be confounded with comparative archeology. Although there are points of contact, the fields are different. Comparative archeology is mainly based on the results of digging with the pick and the spade. It includes studies of certain phases of art and architecture, of inscriptions, of implements, and some other things. It does not deal with the work of the Eskimo, or the Australian, or the Ashantee of to-day. It is a study of past things.

Comparative art, on the contrary, must deal, not only with the past, but also with the present. It will not be a study of written inscriptions, nor of implements, but it will be a study of art, and architecture so far as this is a form of the fine arts, and it must be applied to every district of the globe, not only to the remotest past in which there was art, but to the actual present of to-day and to the future. It will deal not only with the art of the Pleistokenes and the Assyrians, of the Chinese and the Aztecs, but also with the art of the tribes now living in the Amazon and Kongo forests, in the islands of the Pacific, and on the shores of the Arctic.

Now I do not wish to claim that the study of art specimens is going to clear up all the problems of ethnology, or do away with other methods of studying man and his history, or anything else of that kind. I only want to say that here is a field still mainly untilled, in which there is much work to be done, and from which, when it is properly plowed up, a valuable crop of scientific data may be expected.

That comparative art will bring up new problems and perhaps alter some theories of the present seems probable. For instance, it was formerly generally accepted that there are five races of men: a white, a yellow, a brown, a red and a black. Then other theories were started: one that there are only three races, a white, a yellow and a black; and another that there are four races, a white, a yellow, a red and a black. A study of the art of the world, however, tends

to make one revert to the older theory of five main races, if indeed it does not point to more than five. For it seems as if there were sufficiently numerous distinct arts, with sufficiently individual racial characteristics, as to necessitate the classifying them provisionally into at least five and possibly more main classes, corresponding to the five or more races of man from which these arts spring.

Let me now give you some concrete examples of how art can help clear up ethnology. Take the Pleistokene men of western central Europe, usually mistakenly called the Cave men. We have no written records from the Pleistokenes, but we have implements and art. Their implements show that they must have lived near the edge of a great ice sheet and that their habits must have been not unlike those of the Eskimo of to-day. But their art tells us a great deal of which the implements give no hint. In the first place Pleistokent arts tells us the fauna amongst which these men lived. It takes us back to a past geological epoch, when the mammoth and the woolly rhinoceros tichorinus roamed over western Europe. It proves and is the only proof that they had domesticated the horse and possibly the dog and that they lived sometimes in habitations not unlike the teepees of the Red Amerinds. In the next place Pleistokene art reveals the fact that these earliest positively known men were unquestionably advanced in some mental characteristics. They had certainly stopped hanging on by their tails. No one who was not distinctly intelligent could possibly have made their sculptures, their drawings and their paintings. Another fact their art shows is that in all probability they were not a Negroid race. Ordinary Bantu art, and also the art of Great Benin, is too unlike Pleistokene art to warrant the belief that its makers could have been blood relations of the Pleistokenes. Certain qualities of Pleistokene art suggest early Greek art, but there are more resemblances which suggest Chinese or Eskimo work, so that the evidence of art, and it is the strongest evidence on the subject, is that the earliest known race was a yellow race.

Take the case of the eastern United States. Mr. Henry C. Mercer, I believe, and many other ethnologists claim that there is no civilization preceding that of the Amerinds or American Indians on this continent. Dr. Charles C. Abbott *per contra* claims that

there is an earlier geological horizon whose argillite implements show there was an earlier race. Unfortunately, there are apparently no art specimens known from the same horizon as these argillite implements. But the lucky finding of a few, only a few, works of art, in undisturbed strata, would tell us positively whether those argillite implements belonged to the Amerinds or whether there really was a previous race. In other words, art would tell us what the implements do not.

Take now the case of the people who inhabit the oceanic fringe of Alaska and British Columbia. I believe ethnologists consider that they are members of the red race of America. But their art raises doubts. Whilst it has certainly some resemblances to the art of Old Mexico and of the United States, it has many more to the art of the brown races of the Pacific. It is more nearly in touch with New Zealand art, with New Guinea art, and so forth, than it is with the art of the rest of America. It shows pretty definitely that, even if these northwestern tribes are not primarily a Pacific island race, yet there must have been some intercourse and some immigration, else they could not produce works of art so similar to those of some of the tribes in the southern Pacific.

Let me give you one more instance. The present art of Japan is an intrusive art which came over from China some fifteen hundred years ago, as is shown by written records. Art critics are only just beginning to find out that it has never risen to the heights reached by its parent art of China. But digging has revealed the fact that there was some more elementary art in Japan which was probably earlier than the Chinese influence. This and some of their own more recent work, their discarded suits of lacquered armor are notable examples, have art qualities which are not Chinese. They are much more in touch with some South Sea art, with that of New Ireland, for instance. The evidence of their art would tend to show that the Japanese were a brown race, who adopted much of Chinese civilization.

To sum up now briefly the gist of this paper, I would submit the following main points:

1. Art is found in every part of the world.

2. Art as a whole has not been studied and examined enough as yet.

3. The art of the whole world should be studied from an esthetic point of view not only locally and individually, but in its broadest relations, in its resemblances and its differences. This branch of science might well be called comparative art.

4. Comparative art, that is the study of the relations in the art of the world, must be done from the esthetic standpoint by persons who are trained art critics.

5. Comparative art, properly worked out, may be expected to throw much light on the story of man.